United Nations

Daily Highlights

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TUESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ General Assembly launches International Year of Family, with theme: "Family: resources and responsibilities in a changing world"; Secretary-General says he hopes Year will serve as positive intitiative for human dignity and human rights.

+ Prime Minister of Haiti announces new initiative to solve Haitian crisis within framework of Governors Island Agreement; aims to convene national conference with representatives from all sectors of society; Secretary-General pledges continued United Nations support.

+ Secretary-General describes death of President Felix Houphouet-Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire today as loss of African founding father; says President's goals of freedom and independence and his wise guidance remain.

+ Seventy States meet in Cartagena, Colombia, with view to restructuring and refinancing Global Environment Facility; target of $2 billion set for global environmental activities, including implementation of UNCED agreements, in next three years.

+ United Kingdom, in letter to Secretary-General, rejects allegation by Bosnia and Herzegovina that it refused to prevent genocide against Bosnian people; says it will vigorously defend itself against any proceedings instituted in International Court of Justice.

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The General Assembly launched the International Year of the Family (1994) at its plenary meeting this morning. Proclaimed by the Assembly in December 1989, the Year is intended as an oppportunity to increase awareness of the importance of family issues such as single parenthood, child-raising and the ageing of populations. The Year's theme is "Family: resources and responsibilities in a changing world".

In his opening statement this morning, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali stressed that support for the family must not come at the expense of each person's human rights. He hoped that the Year would lead to action on behalf of the family, and also serve as a positive intitiative for

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human dignity and human rights. "In the change and confusion of the modern world, families are a source of stability and promise. Families can help to bridge ethnic and political divisions. They can enhance economic potential They can promote social welfare and social responsibility," he said.

In his address, General Assembly President S.R. Insanally (Guyana) quoted the idea that "if we want better people to make a better world, we should begin where people are made -- in the family". However, the institution of the family was under constant siege, from recession, unemployment, changing values, moral degradation and such evils as crime, drugs, disease and violence. "For these reasons, Governments would be best advised," he said, "to formulate appropriate policies to enable families to adapt to the demands of change and, thus, remain as the bedrock of our civilization."

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Prime Minister Robert Malval of Haiti today announced a new initiative aimed at solving the crisis in that country within the framework of the Governors Island Agreement. The initiative would take the form of a national conference which would bring together all sectors in Haiti to discuss implementation of the Agreement and the mid- and long-term problems facing the country. Mr. Malval told correspondents at Headquarters that he had had a very constructive meeting with Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali this morning, and that the Secretary-General and the Security Council would strongly support the initiative.

"We want to rekindle hope," Mr. Malval said. so that the people of Haiti did not despair and take to the seas to the United States or to other islands in the Carribbean. To that end, the initiative would deal with Haiti's political, economic, moral and human rights problems. The return of order in Haiti required the return of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to power, he stressed. However, President Aristide's return alone would not solve the country's problems. The main criterion for participation in the conference would be acceptance of the Governors Island Agreement as the basis for dialogue. Mr. Malval added that he would leave today for Rome in order to ask the Vatican to lend its moral support to the iniative.

A United Nations spokesman later said that the Secretary-General hoped that the initiative would give new impetus to the search for a solution to the Haitian crisis within the context of the Governors Island Agreement. The Secretary-General had pledged that he would continue to work to that end with the constitutional Government of Haiti, in collaboration with the Organization of American States (OAS).

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The death of President Felix Houphouet-Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire today was described by Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali as the loss of a founding father of the African continent. Expressing his personal sense of bereavement, he said the President had been a true friend who gave himself unstintingly to the cause of peace and development. His towering presence was gone, but the goals of freedom and independence which he had upheld would remain.

Mr. Boutros-Ghali said the example of President Houphouet-Boigny's life and his wisdom would continue to be provide guidance. He wanted his condolences to the Government and people of Côte d'Ivoire to be a message of hope, in that the President would live on in people's adherence to his ideals.

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A restructured and financially replenished Global Environment Facility (GEF) is expected to emerge from a meeting of more than 70 Governments being held this week in Cartagena, Colombia. That would be the first major step towards implementing agreements reached at last year's United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). The GEF emerged from UNCED as the principal funding mechanism for global environmental activities, particularly in relation to the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The GEF was originally launched as a three-year pilot programme in 1991, and its current phase will end in mid-1994. The GEF has already committed more than $730 million to 113 projects aimed at helping developing countries deal with the threat to the global environment from climate change, the loss of biodiversity, pollution of international waters and depletion of the ozone layer. Donor countries have already agreed on a target of $2 billion for GEF II, representing a considerable increase in resources available over the next three years. If issues related to the governance of the GEF are resolved, donors are expected to announce pledges in Cartagena.

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The United Kingdom has rejected allegations by Bosnia and Herzegovina that it failed in its affirmative obligation and refused to prevent genocide against the Bosnian people. In a letter to the Secretary-General dated 6 December, the United Kingdom said that if Bosnia and Herzegovina instituted legal proceedings against it before the International Court of Justice, it would vigorously defend itself.

In a letter to the Secretary-General dated 24 November, Bosnia and Herzegovina declared its intention to institute such procedings, saying that the United Kingdom had violated the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; and other sources of general international law set forth in the World Court's Statute.

Bosnia and Herzegovina said that it would also serve notice on the more than 100 Contracting Parties to the Genocide Convention that "each and every one of them has a solemn legal and moral obligation 'to prevent' the commission of genocide in and against the People and State of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina". The United Kingdom, it went on to say, had promoted options, "ostensibly as solutions to the aggression against the Republic", that were inconsistent with the terms of the 1965 treaty on racial discrimination.

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